

Local Produce Safety Initiative: Making Food Safety Safe for NC Small Farms

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Overview



- Project background
- Project methodology
- Project findings to date
- Next steps



Project Background

- **About GAP and GAP Audits**
- **GAPs:** Good Agricultural Practices a system for assessing and managing some of the risks to the health and safety of raw agricultural commodities that result from the production, harvesting, transportation, storage and handling of those commodities on the farm.
- **GAP Audits:** System for third party assessment of a farm's practices for managing some health and safety risks in the production, harvest, transportation, storage and handling of raw agricultural commodities.



Project Background

USDA GAP Audit: Multiple modules, including:

- general questions
- farm review
- field harvest
- storage and transportation
- house packing.

To receive certification under any module, the audited entity must earn 80 percent of the points available in that module.

Project Background

GAPs are not a perfect tool for assessing or managing risk and they do not guarantee safety (see Jensen Farms cantaloupe outbreak)

Example: Method of irrigation has a significant impact on the risk of pathogen contamination:

- Drip and micro-sprinkler irrigation provide better control of pathogen risk than overhead irrigation
- GAP audit does not address, nor award points based on, the method of irrigation used on the farm.





Project Background

North Carolina Fresh Produce Safety Task Force (NCFPSTF) identified that existing GAPs guidance and audit regimes are not well-suited to small-scale, diversified, low-input produce farms due to:

- limited manpower, which makes GAP record-keeping more burdensome on the farm operators;
- reliance on low-cost fertility sources such as compost and manure;



Project Background

NCFPSTF-identified obstacles to GAP certification for small-scale, diversified, low-input produce farms, cont'd.:

- limited capacity to make capital investments, which are assumed as a cost of doing business in larger farming operations;
- use of environmentally sensitive production practices, particularly related to soil conservation and biological pest controls, that are perceived under some inspection regimes as conflicting with GAPs; and
- reliance on multiple crops, including livestock, to diversify income streams and mitigate risk



Project Background

- **NC SLFAC 2010 Report Recommendation :**

“NCDA&CS and NCSU should develop an All-Farm GAPs Pilot Program for Small Farmers: Support the state’s small and diversified fruit and vegetable farmers by working with the North Carolina Fresh Produce Safety Task Force and its partners to develop an All-Farm GAPs (Good Agricultural Practices) pilot program.”



Project Partners

- Carolina Farm Stewardship Association
- NCSU Dept. of 4-H Youth Development and Family and Consumer Science
- NC Fresh Produce Safety Task Force

Funding provided by:

- NC Specialty Crops Block Grant through NCDA&CS
- Rural Advancement Foundation-International Communities Reinvestment Program
- NC Dept. of Public Instruction



Project Methodology

- Collected information on GAP costs and barriers from 12 small, diversified NC farms (operations with less than 20 acres under cultivation and growing at least 8 commodities) as they take steps toward USDA GAP certification
- 2 to 4 visits with each of the 12 farms over the period from May to November, 2011



Data Collection Activities

- document reviews
- surveying farmers on projected capital and labor costs necessary to meet certification requirements
- tracking time required to document practices as required by USDA GAP audit protocols
- tracking actual capital investments such as sorting tables or product washing facilities
- tracking water testing costs
- and tracking costs related to changes in fertility management made in response to GAP protocols

Data Collection Activities



- farmer journals (video, audio and text) documenting their food safety risk reduction activities and discussing any problems encountered
- dialog with Grading Services staff at the NCDA&CS to clarify inspection requirements and interpretations

Project Findings to Date

Audit Expenses and Crop Diversity:

Inspectors conducting an on-farm GAP audit will include in their certification all crops that they can observe being harvested at the time of the audit



Project Findings to Date



Variation in buyer needs

- Some may be satisfied by a GHP audit of a packing or warehousing facility, whether the farm's own or a shared/co-packing facility.
- Defining the scope of the certification required creates an opportunity for the producer to educate the buyer on the appropriate level of food safety assessment for a given farm and buyer



Audit Challenges for Small Farms

- Documentation/time
- Use of compost and manure
- Water source, treatment, testing
- Animals
- Equipment and Facilities (harvesting tools, containers, etc.)
- Traceability



Next Steps

- Economic analysis of data
- GAP audits of participating farms in Spring and Summer 2012
- Publication of guidance manual and documents

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